THE

RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. II. December 11, 1936 Kislev 27, 5697 No. 16

EDITORIALS

ORGANIZATION VS. EDUCATION

GREATER FREEDOM FOR RELIGION IN RUSSIA

JEWISH CREEDALISM AGAIN

INCOMPATIBLE NOTIONS ABOUT GOD

By Mordecai M. Kaplan

THE RABBI AND THE FIGHT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

By Edward T. Sandrow

LODZ, CITY BUILT ON SAND

By Samuel Dinin

CORRESPONDENCE

REALITIES OF JEWISH LIFE

Published by

THE SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM

15 West 86th Street, New York, N. Y.

HAVE YOU FRIENDS

—who are always telling you that Jewish life has no future?

—who think Judaism is obsolete?

—who insist that Judaism is necessarily reactionary?

—who are seeking an intelligent and constructive philosophy and program for Jewish life?

—who have heard about "Reconstructionism" but don't know what it is all about?

IF SO

send us their names and addresses and we shall forward them a sample copy of THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST, of which Ludwig Lewisohn has said that it has "intellectual seriousness which is so rare in Jewish-American life as it is, for that matter, in American life itself."

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST,
15 West 86th Street,
New York, N. Y.

Please send a copy of THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST to the following:

NAME ..... ADDRESS .....

NAME ..... ADDRESS .....

NAME ..... ADDRESS .....

You may (not) mention my name.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

THE
RECONSTRUCTIONIST

Vol. II. December 11, 1936 Kislev 27, 5697 No. 16

EDITORIAL BOARD

MORDECAI M. KAPLAN, Chairman

Michael Alper — Ira Eisenstein
Ben Zion Bokser — Eugene Kohn
Israel S. Chipkin — Samuel C. Kohs
Samuel Dinin — Milton Steinberg
Hannah Machlowitz, Secretary

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Isaac B. Berkson — Jacob S. Golub
Barnett R. Brickner — Leo L. Honor
Alexander M. Dushkin — Edward L. Israel

The RECONSTRUCTIONIST is published bi-weekly for twenty consecutive issues starting in October, by The Society for the Advancement of Judaism, 15 West 86th St., New York, N. Y. Subscription $1.00 a year; foreign $1.25; individual copy 10 cents. Entered as second class matter January 9, 1935, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.
The editorials represent the opinions of the editors only.

EDITORIALS

Organization vs. Education

IN the last issue of the *Reconstructionist,* the question was asked, "Shall those who sympathize with the philosophy and program of *Reconstructionism* organize themselves into an active and militant movement or shall they constitute themselves a 'school of thought' for the purpose of working within existing institutions and movements and influencing them from within." Unfortunately, some readers of this magazine so misunderstood the problem posed that a further word on the issue must be written. We refer particularly to the comments of Dr. Margoshes, in his English column of *The Day* (N.Y.) He advises, "By all means, form an organization and the more militant the better. . . . A little of the fighting spirit, we believe, may give *Reconstructionism* exactly the quality that has been lacking in its blood. . . . So go to it, Professor, and let's see the fists fly."

Apparently, Dr. Margoshes enjoys a good fight. We are sorry that we cannot oblige him, for we are not interested in giving him a thrill. The problem we face is not so easily solved, nor does it envisage Jewish life in terms of political squabbles. There is enough struggle for power in Jewish life already, to satisfy even so virile an observer as Dr. Margoshes. There is enough jockeying for position in Zionist politics, synagogue politics and philanthropic politics. The *Reconstructionist* has no intention of entering the fray on those terms.

Our question is a very simple one. Is the time ripe for a realignment of forces in Jewish life? The old slogans no longer connote systematic and integrated philosophies. Reformism has gone Zionistic; Orthodoxy harbors within its ranks a vast group of discontented followers; Conservatism remains vague and amorphous, and its constituents seek a clear vision and a concrete program; erstwhile assimilationists find themselves thrust back to Jewish life, unequipped with a purpose to their lives as Jews. Undoubtedly, *Reconstructionism* offers all of these Jews something to live for as Jews.

But have the philosophy and program of *Reconstructionism* penetrated sufficiently to warrant a broad move to *reorganize* Jewish life? Achieving new leadership within existing organizations is not enough. This Dr. Margoshes does not understand. If Zionism, education, philanthropy and religion were to be manned by sympathizers of *Reconstructionism,* these activities would still remain mutually competitive, fragmentary, unintegrated. What Jewish life requires is a structure by means of which the organic relationship of all Jewish interests would be attained. This end cannot be forced. Its necessity and inevitability must be ap-

preciated and felt from within. Jews must be educated to a new point of view.

But Dr. Margoshes seems to have little faith in education. He says, "A school of thought will get you nowhere.... (Jews) are not much given to thought anyway." If, then, as Dr. Margoshes so blandly asserts, Jews are impervious to thought, neither organization nor philosophy will avail. The latter will make no impression, and the former will have no means of coercing Jews into cooperation. Unarmed as we Jews are with taxing or police power, nothing but education will transform the character of Jewish life. The necessary education we are attempting to carry on. When we speak of "working within existing institutions" we do not mean capturing their leadership; we mean educating their constituents to the need of a completely new approach to the whole problem of Jewish life, by interpreting the sterility of these institutions as due to their individualism, their failure to appreciate the interdependence of all positive Jewish activity, their obsolete ideology, etc.

We ask again: has sufficient education been carried on? Are interested Jews ready to demand of their leaders that a conference be called of all Jewish organizations to discuss reorganization? Are they as yet completely aware of their objectives? Do they understand well enough the type of Jewish life which they require?

To judge from Dr. Margoshes' reaction to our editorial, a good deal of education has yet to be done.

Greater Freedom For Religion In Russia

LOYAL Jews must be heartened by the constant revisions that are taking place in the official attitude of the Soviet Union toward religion. There was a time when communists regarded all religions in their historical as well as contemporary manifestations as tools of the exploiting classes, by which workers were to be kept in ignorance and submission. It was vain to point to the Prophets, with their brilliant defense of the down-trodden masses of their day against kings and nobles. It was vain to point to the present concern on the part of so many teachers of religion with the vital tasks of social reconstruction. Atheism remained a cardinal element in all communist propaganda.

We were, of course, aware that this attitude of the communists was at least in part conditioned by their actual experience with the Russian Church, which, as a matter of fact, had functioned as an ally of the Czarist autocracy in its war against the liberation of the masses. And we had hoped that as conditions in Russia became more stable, religion would be seen in better perspective. Recent events seem to indicate that this is what is actually taking place.

Only the other day the Russian censor banned a comic opera which ridiculed the christening of the Russian people by Prince Vladimir of the tenth century. He justified his decision on the ground that, in relation to the totality of social forces at play in the tenth century, Russia's conversion to Christianity was a progressive act, and the opera, by ridiculing it, was distorting the facts of history. Similarly Joseph Stalin in his speech recommending the adoption of the new constitution, in objecting to an amendment which contemplated the disfranchisement of ministers of religion, explained significantly that the disabilities from which these people suffered under Soviet laws were not enacted for all time, but only temporarily. "There was a time when these elements waged open war against the people, and resisted Soviet laws. The Soviet law depriving them of suffrage represented the reply of the Soviet power to this resistance. . . . Hasn't the time arrived to revise this law? I believe that it has come." Stalin was even willing to contemplate the election of numbers of this group to the supreme organs of political power in

the country, and offered as his major reason that at the present time "not all former . . . priests are hostile to the Soviet power."

The new tendency has already had its reverberations in the columns of the *New Masses,* which saw fit in its current issue to review Mr. Bates' new edition of the Bible, and Harby's edited "The Bible in Art." The review is moreover wholly appreciative, and includes the following: "By now it is trite to say that the Bible is essentially the *literature* of the Jewish people over a considerable period of its history. It contains also its social and political philosophy; in the chronicles it reflects the class war and the struggles of a small state against imperialism. Much of what is most universally admired in it are those protests and visions of social change which make the Bible the repository of some of the greatest revolutionary literature yet produced." The approach to the Bible may be trite as far as critical students of the Bible are concerned, but the communists learned it only very recently.

Honestly applied, Russia's present attitude toward religion ought to spell a definite improvement in the status of Russian Judaism. If Jewish communists were only to drop the passions of partisanship and look at the facts of Jewish tradition in proper historic perspective, they would find that so much of what they had spurned really represented the moral dynamics that moved the hearts and minds of the best elements in Israel throughout the ages. If Russians may regard their conversion to Christianity as a progressive event, dare not Jews say at least as much for their liberation from Egyptian bondage, or their defeat of Syrio-Greek imperialism? Ought not Jewish communists therefore look affirmatively upon Passover and Hanukkah? Indeed, in areas of Jewish concentration, certainly in Biro-Bidjan, these occasions should be official holidays. If the Bible does contain the articulated strivings of the Jewish masses for social justice, shouldn't it be included in the curriculum of the government's sponsored Jewish schools? If religion functioned as a progressive force in relation to the Russian scene of the tenth century, why can it not do so again in modern times, if it reckons with the scientific knowledge and social needs of our day? Such a religion—Christianity or Judaism—ought to be given the opportunity to function without any restrictions whatsoever. It certainly ought to have the right—a right that is still denied it—to transmit its message to the next generation. We sincerely hope that recent developments are only the harbingers of a greater freedom for religion in Russia in the not too distant future.

Jewish Creedalism Again

JEWISH readers of the daily press, whose attention is caught naturally by any news item of Jewish interest, must have observed a column printed in the *New York Times* of November 15. A report from Washington described a debate held before a congregation in that city between Rabbi Isaac Landman of Brooklyn, and Mr. Benjamin Stolberg. The issue under discussion was "Should Judaism Be the Law of the Jew?" Rabbi Landman, a Reformist, argued the affirmative; Mr. Stolberg, an assimilationist, the negative.

With Mr. Stolberg's case we are not at the moment concerned. His argumentation was typical of the radical assimilationist. The articles which have appeared from his pen from time to time have already marked him as an individual who speaks on Jewish issues with much heat but with little understanding. What does concern us especially is the kind of defense advanced by Rabbi Landman on behalf of Judaism and the particular interpretation of Judaism upon which it is based. This defender of our tradition, as his speech was reported in the *New York Times,* made the following case for Judaism. He argued that only religion makes a Jew a Jew. He denied the racial and the nationalist theories of a Jewish identity as well as the philosophy of Judaism as a

culture or civilization, which is the *Reconstructionist* position. On the last, he said explicitly, "Judaism interpreted as a separatist, segregating culture or civilization within the culture or civilization of the nation in which we claim citizenship, constitutes only an added vexation of the spirit for them who hold confused ideas about Jews and are unacquainted with or distort the ideals of Judaism as religion."

Rabbi Landman's case closed with a statement of the moral values of the Jewish religion, its insistence on human equality, justice, mercy and social righteousness. In these he saw the ideal values which justify loyalty to the Jewish heritage.

We defer to no one in our reverence for and our devotion to the social ideals of the Jewish tradition. Our journal has often been criticized because we have been bold enough to apply these ideals to specific contemporary problems. We do not quarrel with Rabbi Landman because of his loyalty to the moral values of Judaism. But we do protest against his theory of Jewish life. We object to it because it lacks logic, it circumscribes the scope of Jewish interest and, as a result it is calculated to confirm assimilationists, like Mr. Stolberg, in their assimilationist attitudes.

Rabbi Landman says that Judaism is purely a matter of religion. He points out, however, that the religious and moral ideals of Judaism are held by Judaism and Christianity alike. If so, why remain a Jew and suffer all the penalties associated with a Jewish identity? One might just as well be a Unitarian or a Methodist; as such, one could maintain the same theological and ethical attitudes without social discomfort.

What is more, if Judaism be purely a matter of religion and ethics, what will Rabbi Landman do with those many Jews who, often for reasons of the utmost integrity, cannot accept theological belief? Would Rabbi Landman deny these people the right to the name Jew? We are as interested as he is in winning these people over to a religious interpretation of the universe, but we will not in any spirit of exclusiveness deny them participation in other areas of Jewish life.

In other words, when Rabbi Landman was through with his case, he had not proved that Judaism should remain the law of the Jew. He had not shown why the Jew should adhere to Judaism rather than to some analogous creed and morality. Nor had he left room in Jewish life for the Jew who is not theologically minded.

In sharp contrast to his case stands the position of the *Reconstructionist* which he dismisses so summarily. To us Judaism is the civilization of the Jewish people. It is an organic unity with all the elements that go to make up any other civilization. It includes a religion in its living whole as a *primus inter pares*. It attempts to convince the Jewish agnostic of the validity of the religious outlook, but it does not say to him, provided he lives in other areas of Jewish interest, that he has no share in the House of Israel. Indeed, that which is a problem in Rabbi Landman's philosophy, the question why Judaism rather than Unitarianism, is no problem at all to us. Judaism is a unique culture into which a Jew is born, to which he is tied by the thousands of bonds that unite any individual to his heritage and from which he can derive rich and variegated blessings. And the Jewish religion is an organic part of the heritage.

But beyond all the illogicalities, there is a practical difficulty that plagues Rabbi Landman's creedalism. It is all too thin, too limited to enlist sustained enthusiasm. Rabbi Landman would come to the Jew and say, "Your Judaism offers you only a belief and a morality, which incidentally you can get in pretty much the same form through other religious associations which do not carry with them social penalties. But that is all that Judaism offers you." Our philosophy of Judaism comes to the Jew and says, "Judaism offers you a religious outlook and a morality but also a language, a literature, a folklore, an art, a music, a law, a system of communal institutions, the privilege of associating

yourself with an ancient tradition and with its hopes for its own future and for the future of mankind." We leave it to the reader to decide which is truer to the historic character of Judaism, which is a fuller and richer program, and which is better calculated to enable Judaism to remain the law of the Jew.

—o—

Incompatible Notions About God*

By Mordecai M. Kaplan

WE cannot expect to understand the nature of God. Who of us even knows the nature of man, or for that matter his own nature? We cannot even predict what we will be doing and thinking ten minutes from now. But we must be able to state definitely what experiences or phenomena we are prepared to identify as manifestations of God, and why we identify them as such.

The fact that the nature of God is beyond our understanding does not mean that we can afford to conceive of Him in terms that are clearly not true in accordance with the highest standards of truth. Our conception of God must be self-consistent and consistent with whatever else we hold to be true. That this conception will not describe Him we know, just as our conception of life does not begin to give us the faintest idea of what life means to the infinite variety of living creatures that inhabit our earth. But we do not plead our inability to understand all that life means as an excuse for making assertions about life which are inconsistent with experience. Just so we must insist that whatever we say or think about God shall be in harmony with all else that we hold to be true. We cannot, for example, believe that God performs miracles, and at the same time believe in the uniformities of natural law demanded by scientific theory.

In our thinking about God we must avoid all those mental habits which issue in logical fallacies. The most common of these is the habit of hypostasis, or assuming the separate identifiable existence of anything for which language has a name. There is a considerable difference, for example, between the way a scientist thinks of gravity and the way most laymen think of it. A scientist regards it as a property or quality of matter, a descriptive term for the way masses of matter behave in relation to one another. The average layman, however, thinks of it as a force, an invisible something that acts upon masses of matter pulling them together. According to both conceptions, gravity is real and must undeniably be reckoned with, but the layman finds it difficult to regard gravity as real without at the same time thinking of it as a thing, an object, a self-existing being or entity.

When we study the historical development of the God idea, we realize to what extent the mental habit of hypostasis (the tendency to treat qualities, attributes, relationships as though they had a separate existence) has been responsible for the contradictions and ambiguities that have discredited the conception of God and driven many to atheism. Before the origin of monotheistic religion, people spoke not of God but of gods. What was then the meaning of the word "god"? A god was a being, mostly non-human, but at times also human, to whom worship was accorded because he was regarded as possessing the power to help men realize their aims and achieve their desires. The existence of other non-human beings was taken for granted. But a "god" was a being that stood in reciprocal relationship

* Excerpts from the Introduction to the forthcoming book, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion.* Behrman Jewish Book House, N. Y.

with a group like a family, clan, tribe, or nation. That relationship involved, on the part of the god, a claim to worship, and on the part of his worshipers, a claim to protection. Just as in their secular and political life, men were concerned with the question of who should be king, long before they asked themselves what the nature of sovereignty was, and how it should be asserted, so ancient peoples were concerned in their religious life not with the question of *what* God was, but with the question of *who* their God was. Some real or imagined beings were identified as those to whom worship was due; the others were rejected. Such is the background of the verse: "I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and ye shall know that I YHWH, am your God who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."

There can be no question that the *Shema Yisrael,* whatever meaning it may have subsequently acquired, meant originally nothing more than that Israelites should worship YHWH, and YHWH alone, as their God. It contained no implication that the beings whom the other nations worshiped were non-existent, but merely that they were not to be considered as gods, or as entitled to worship. They were not gods; YHWH alone was God. He alone held sway in the heavens and on the earth. Christianity and Mohammedanism similarly in their origin did not think of God generically. They did not ask themselves what God was or meant, but answered the question, "Who is God?" by answering, in the one case, "Jesus is God," and in the other, "Allah is God," Allah being the name of one of the many deities worshiped by the Arabs before the advent of Mohammed. In the Greco-Roman world of classic antiquity, the gods who were worshiped were personifications of forces of nature, the rain, the sun, the sea, the earth, etc., which were thought of not as natural phenomena, but as beings whose aspect and behavior the imagination of the Greeks conceived in anthropomorphic terms.

It was only with the development of the philosophic movement among the Greeks that men began to think generically about God. The Greek philosophers were supremely interested in the formulation of generic concepts, in such questions as: "What is an animal? How is it that dogs, horses and cats can all differ from one another and yet be animals? What constitutes the essence "animal" in the dog, and what is merely the "dog" in him? Similarly, they were interested in problems of human psychology, in an analysis of human nature. They did not look upon men merely as individuals, but were interested in the question of what qualities are common to the genus man, and distinguish it from, let us say, the genus beast. This same interest in the generic led them to the question: What constitutes the godhood of the gods? They were less interested in Zeus as Zeus, or in Athene as Athene, than they were interested in the *god* in Zeus and in Athene. One finds them frequently, therefore, speaking of God in the singular, and it would be easy to imagine that they were really at heart monotheists like the Jews. But that would be an erroneous conclusion. When we say, "Man is a biped," we do not mean that there is only one man; and when a Greek philosopher said God was perfect, he was talking in a similar generic sense, using the term "God" to express a concept of godhood in all its manifestations. There is no reason to believe that Aristotle did not worship the same individual gods as his fellow Greeks, or that he even doubted their existence.

In Alexandria, during the second and first centuries before the common era, the Jewish religion came into contact with Greek philosophy. It was then that a synthesis took place. The idea of God, conceived individually as a superhuman Person to whom worship is exclusively due, was combined with the idea of God, conceived generically, as a concept embracing all those qualities and attributes that make men regard certain objects and persons as divine. The religious philosophers effected

this synthesis by the process of hypostasis. God became the personification of the generic concept of godhood, and YHWH, the God of Israel, was assumed to have always possessed as personal traits the perfection of whatever qualities were associated with deity: power, wisdom, love, justice, sovereignty. These qualities in their perfection made God eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient. At the same time the synthesis with the individual God of tradition endowed Him with such human attributes as loving, rewarding, punishing, being influenced by prayer and praise and a host of other personal qualities which, when analyzed, are meaningless as applied to an eternal and infinite being. These contradictions emerge again and again in the writings of the religious philosophers from Philo down to the theologians of our day.

Some appreciation of the dilemma in which the religious philosophers found themselves as a result of this synthesis of a personal God with a generic God shows itself in the difficulty they experienced in interpreting the simple declaration of Jewish faith, "YHWH is our God, YHWH alone." If YHWH is to be considered a superhuman Being, its meaning is clearly that only this one superhuman Being is God and should be worshiped. But if God is to be thought of generically, there is no point to saying that He is one, for any general concept, such as man, beast, bird, triangle, is not subject to number. They are, therefore, at great pains to tell us that not only is God one, but He is one with a unique unity, a unity that is not a term of a numerical series nor composed of fractional parts. But, obviously, if the term "unity" when applied to God has an utterly different meaning from that which it has when applied to anything else, the affirmation of God's unity conveys no meaning to us at all. It is as if one were to say of a certain object that it is red, but not red in the sense of the color red, but in a totally different sense of the term, that applies to that object alone.

Such is the confusion into which we are led by the tendency to combine two incompatible ways of thinking about God, one, that of naive personification, the other, that of philosophical abstraction. If we want to get at the reality behind genuine religious experience, we must steer clear of both these ways of thinking. We have to identify as godhood, or as the divine quality of universal being, all the relationships, tendencies and agencies which in their totality go to make human life worthwhile in the deepest and most abiding sense. The divine is no less real, no less dependable for our personal salvation or self-realization, if we think of it as a quality than if we think of it as an entity or being. Human personality may serve as an illustration. It is no less real, if we think of it in psychological terms, as a system of behavior patterns in which the human organism reacts to the world, than if we think of it as a sort of invisible spiritual man that inhabits the visible physical man and determines his behavior.

The Rabbi and the Fight for Social Justice

By EDWARD T. SANDROW *

OF late several disquieting episodes have occurred, relative to the activities of prominent rabbis, which constitute a serious challenge and propound a query demanding an immediate answer. They bring to a head the pressing issue of the true function of the modern rabbi. In one instance the Board of Directors acting as the spokesman for a congregation met and adopted a resolution deploring the activities of the rabbi who interested himself in modern social problems. They suggested, with a pointed lack of subtlety, that henceforth the rabbi confine himself to his "rabbinical duties"—whatever that may mean. In another case, a prominent layman connected with a large corporation took it upon himself to write to the head of a theological seminary from which a certain rabbi had been graduated, and advised him to "crack down" upon this particular alumnus for the same sin of taking his part as a spiritual leader in the social and economic struggles of the day.

I will not discuss the motives that prompted these objectors; let it be said, for the present, that they had axes to grind, and that the inference could be easily drawn that they were likely to sustain a purely personal loss if any disturbance of the economic status quo were to take place. What I am interested in here is the position of the rabbi in such a case. Is he to be subservient to the demands of the people who engage him, and amenable to the threats of other influential laymen —or must he take the bit in his teeth and do his duty as he sees it, regardless of consequences?

Now, everyone able to think for himself must realize that the world, which includes the Jews, still needs religion and religious leaders. The advancement of science, the increase in popular education and the complexities of life have not reduced the necessity of religious and spiritual satisfaction. At the same time, we know that the supernatural elements in all religions have been undermined and the ancient authority questioned, criticized and in many cases repudiated. This is as true of the Jewish as of other religions, and leaves some religious leaders in a sort of a "no man's land" of doubt and bewilderment.

Among Jews, rabbis have always been honored for their learning. A working knowledge of the Jewish heritage, of rabbinic and modern Hebrew literature, is as indispensable to a rabbinical career as pharmacology to a physician or torts to an attorney. But let us be honest about this. Learning is a purely relative term. Either because there was no secular knowledge to speak of, or, in the ghettos, it was not available, a certain dexterity in the sophistry and casuistry of the Talmud constituted the learning of the rabbi. It probably sufficed for the needs of the time, the place and the circumstances. Furthermore, in other days many of the laymen were themselves versed in the traditional Jewish learning. Without going into reasons for the change it may be said that the congregations of the present day with few exceptions are much less acquainted with Jewish knowledge and hence have less capacity for judging and appreciating the esoteric knowledge of the rabbi. Therefore if the rabbi of today, particularly in the more "advanced" congregations, cut off from the prestige formerly associated with the possession of Talmudic knowledge, is forced by the fears or prejudices of influential members of the congregation to take a stand of benevolent neutrality, or actually to take no part at all in the solution of social and economic prob-

* Rabbi in Portland, Oregon.

lems, what in heaven's name is his leadership to consist of?

Of course, there are a few alternatives which, alas, not a few have accepted, to the detriment of their souls, their self-respect and Judaism itself. The rabbi can be a social butterfly, a polite hanger-on at teas and social functions which means making himself as unobtrusive and innocuous as possible. He can be a professional "good fellow," sought after as an after-dinner speaker at Rotary Clubs and make of himself, for Gentile consideration, an example of how nice a chap a "Jewish minister" can be. He can be a sort of liaison officer between the Jewish and Gentile worlds, all of which, while meritorious in itself, should not be the sole function of a rabbi. He can be a "fashionable minister," as other denominations have them, to flatter and cajole his well-fed and smug congregation and make them believe he is devoted to their spiritual welfare. But in all these instances, what becomes of true Jewish leadership?

If Judaism is to survive, Jewish leadership is needed today more than ever. Now the plain, indubitable facts are that a dubious happiness in a future *Gan Eden* has been pushed further and further into the background, and more and more stress is being laid on the possibilities of this world we are living in, and on the consistency of true religious leadership with the advocacy of social justice, political freedom and other modern movements for the betterment of mankind. By simple elimination we can only conclude that unless a modern rabbi is allowed to, and actually does, interest himself, preach about and take part in economic reforms and the attainment of social justice, he is not and cannot be a true rabbi and a real leader of his people. Any denial of this almost axiomatic fact must be scrutinized with suspicion.

There is another danger lurking in the offing. To put it as plainly as possible, the hope of the Jewish civilization and of other cultures and religions lies in the continuation of democracy. A descent into fascism or communism spells the doom of religion, Jewish or non-Jewish. The perpetuation of democracy means the attainment of social justice. Hence, it is the clear duty of the progressive rabbi to shoulder his share of the burden to perpetuate democracy, all opposition to the contrary notwithstanding. He must pay no attention to the faint-hearted, the axe grinders and the reactionaries. To heed them would be an absolute negation of his sacred calling. In fact, if he is to be a rabbi in the full sense of the word he must "get mixed up" in the political, economic and other movements, more or less turbulent, that make for the advancement of humanity. If he does this, Judaism will not fail to receive its share of the benefits.

Lodz, City Built on Sand

By Samuel Dinin

THE *Brothers Ashkenazi** is not so much the story of two brothers as the chronicle of the city of Lodz. The very family name of the two brothers is symbolic, and the story of their rise and fall may very well represent the fortunes of the bulk of Ashkenazic Jews in the countries of Eastern Europe during the past hundred years. Because it is the tale of a city, this novel by Singer, who gave us *Yoshe Kalb,* is brilliant and powerful as a social document, and weak as a novel. For vivid and penetrating as Singer's portraiture often is, his chief characters are not complete human beings, but symbols

* *The Brothers Ashkenazi,* by I. J. Singer. Translated from the Yiddish by Maurice Samuel. Alfred A. Knopf. N. Y., 1936.

of economic and social forces. And because *The Brothers Ashkenazi* is the tale not of a city as a whole, but of the social and economic history of a city, the glimpses we get of the cultural, artistic and religious life of Lodz are incidental and but pale reflections in the light of the struggle of social forces. The result is that *The Brothers Ashkenazi* is all shade and no light. The very reasons, however, which make the chronicle of the city by the Lodka inadequate as a novel, give it a unity of theme and a directness and force that make it one of the most compelling social histories of recent years.

The story of the city of Lodz is told to us through the life histories of the two Ashkenazi brothers. Their rise to economic power is accompanied by a correlative transformation in their beliefs, habits, and dress. Cultural assimilation keeps pace with growth in industrialization, and cultural assimilation for Jews always means a lessening of Jewishness, a discarding of their language, dress, observances and beliefs.

The life cycle of the hasidic boy who was to be the uncrowned king of Lodz is the life cycle of the modern period of emancipation and enlightenment. And it is a period marked by progressive assimilation and disintegration. It is a period of dejudaization, not only for the wealthy industrialists but for those who worked for them as well. And this process of dejudaization brings with it moral as well as cultural dissolution.

It is a bleak picture which Singer paints for us. There is not a redeeming class, nor a redeeming character in it, except for Nissan and Tevyeh, who organize the workers, and who give up the leadership of Moses for that of Marx. Hasidism is revealed in all its ugliness; so is the bankruptcy of upper class assimilationism. Zionism is mentioned, but incidentally and deprecatingly. The corruption of Jewish communal life and the nature of its class control, the inanity and the futility of the Jewish beliefs and practices—all are mercilessly exposed.

Everything Singer writes about is true, but it is not the whole truth. Not even the Jews of Lodz are as bad as all that. Singer writes as he does because he writes out of an agonizing despair. He points no moral, and charts no course for the future because he sees no gleam of hope in the future; he finds only gloom and darkness in the present and the past.

It is a terrifying tale that Singer tells, and though he points no morals a number of things can be learned from it. The Lodz Jews were wholly unprepared for the social and economic forces unleashed by the industrial revolution and by emancipation and enlightenment. Their Judaism had become not a way of life, but a way of escaping from life. It prepared them not for this life but for an imaginary life to come. The ethic of Judaism was based for the most part on the experiences of a nomadic and of an agricultural people. It ill-prepared them for the relationships involved in an industrial age —whether they were employer-employe relationships, family relationships or the million and one relationships created by life in big urban centers. The communal life of the Jew was controlled for the most part by the few wealthy *shtadlanim*—though some rabbis did have influence and power. And the organized community life did little to ameliorate the condition of the masses or prepare them for the struggles ahead of them. Most often it was on the side of the non-Jewish oppressors and not on the side of the Jewish oppressed. And the culture of the Jews had become little more than a mixture of an outmoded Talmudic lore and a medieval mysticism. Not only were the fruits of modern learning forbidden to the Jew, but even the study of his own Bible was deprecated. No wonder that the impact of the modern machine age on Jewish life proved so disastrous.

It should not be forgotten, however, that what was true of the Jews was true also of the Christian masses. They were as ill-prepared as the Jews for modern life. Their religious culture, their ethic,

were equally ineffective in the face of the new situations and the new demands. Their struggles for and their rise to economic power were attended by the same moral and cultural transformations and by the same backsliding from their religious and cultural heritages. We Jews are too eager to tell the world how bad we are and how bankrupt our heritage. We fail to realize that what ails us ails the rest of the world too. And that the cure is not to throw out the baby and the water, or to accept the baptismal water of the Christians for the Jewish baby.

There is, however, one difference between the low estate of Jewish culture and of Jewish communal life, and that of Christianity. The Christians were to a large extent responsible for the sorry plight of the Jews and of Jewish culture. They hounded and harassed the Jews, drove them from one land to another, murdered them by the hundreds of thousands, burned their books, confined them in ghettos and in Pales of Settlement, curbed their economic activities, and made everything connected with the Christian world odious and fearful to the Jews. Whether the causes were economic or religious or racial or psycho-pathological, or a mixture of all these causes, the facts cannot be altered. If the Hasidim of Lodz were ignorant and superstitious and looked to their Tzadik to bring them salvation by some miraculous intercession with the Holy of Holies, then the Christian world must in large measure take the responsibility for this state of things. For in times and in countries where Jews were left unmolested to live and dream and move freely, their cultural level never sank as low as it did in Lodz.

The Jews have always taken the Christians at their word and have been repulsed and deceived again and again. They believed the fine words proclaimed by the French and American constitution and the constitutions of all the other lands, proclaiming liberty and equality for all, including the Jews. The Jews rushed into the arms of their Christian brethren. They took over the dress, the language, the culture of their confreres in every country. They were loyal and patriotic. They shed their blood in defense of all the countries wherein they dwelt. But it availed them nought. For everywhere, the non-Jewish world ultimately turned against them. The workers and the men of wealth were equally disillusioned. For nationalist and racial ties proved stronger than the brotherhood of the proletariat, or of high finance.

It is time we Jews stopped this mad individual onrush into the non-Jewish world and proceeded with dignity and an understanding of what lies ahead of us. The Christian world will not swallow us. Neither will it or we be the gainers by the ultimate disappearance of the Jewish group. We do not have to form a voluntary ghetto or refrain from participating in the affairs of the non-Jewish world. It is too late to turn back altogether, even if that were desirable. It may be that the Jewish laborer is right in feeling that the Jewish capitalist is a worse enemy of his than the Gentile worker, but still we must learn to take counsel as a group and to defend ourselves as a group, for as a group distinct and apart are we treated, despite the many ties that bind us with non-Jews, and which separate us from our fellow-Jews. In short, it is about time we learned to cultivate our own garden.

In cultivating our own garden, we must learn to grow new fruits and flowers which can live and prosper in the new soil and the new climate in which we live. Let it be a garden with a fence, strong enough to keep out hoodlums, but accessible to all and ever open to those who know how to respect gardens. Let us practise the art of cross-fertilization, but the fruits and the garden as well as the soil and the sub-soil must still be ours. Let it be a garden whose fruits are firmly planted so that storms will not uproot them.

* * *

It may be that even with a strong communal organization democratically controlled, and with a culture fully attuned to

the new times, Jewish life may not be able to withstand the social and economic forces of the modern industrial civilization which sweep on inexorably and relentlessly to their own ends. It may be that what happened to Lodz would have happened regardless of what the Jews themselves could have done about it. The Jews could do little about the Crusades, the forced conversions, and the expulsions to which they were subjected in the Middle Ages. But they met these crises and faced death and death-in-life with a heroism and dignity that were an eternal tribute to their faith. The same thing cannot be said of the Jews of Lodz. They are tragic figures—rich and poor alike. Their forces divided, victimized by enemies from within and from without, they have not even the consolation of a common faith or a common fellowship. We need a new Jewish life which will never again produce Jews like the Brothers Ashkenazi.

Correspondence

Can Jewish Life Wait?

Sirs:

What troubled me most in your symposium on "Implementing Reconstructionism" last Sunday night, was the question of emphasis.

Although I do not quarrel with your restriction of concern to Jewish human beings, I still insist that before being Jews, we are human beings. Therefore, I believe your emphasis is incorrectly placed on Jews remaining or becoming good or better Jews, rather than with their remaining or becoming good or better Jewish human beings. The double fury wreaked on lower class Jews during periods of wars and fascism, the imminence of these twin horrors and their economic pedestals need no elaboration, I trust, at this time. In spite of this, once, or maybe twice, I heard mentioned the phrase, "social justice," which, both for Jews and Gentiles, interests me profoundly. Even at that, it seemed to be relegated to secondary importance, as if it were, possibly, too controversial to dwell on, but which still required that some tribute be paid to it in these troubled times. For, I repeat, before being good Jews, we must be live Jews.

At this late date, I thought it was generally accepted that there are class divisions among Jews, as among non-Jews. Similarly, I thought it was accepted that social justice can only be achieved by fighting for it on a militant and anti-capitalist class basis. However, I heard no mention made of this grave class matter. Do you honestly believe that you can appeal to all Jews alike, regardless of their class position? Since the Jewish worker and the lower middle class Jew have so much to gain by social change, doesn't the necessary attendant economic disadvantages to the upper middle class Jew conflict with his mere ethical desire for social justice? Shouldn't that insurmountable antagonism to social justice generally exclude him from your following? Don't you have to face the problem of whether you are unconsciously soft-pedaling the class issue to widen your appeal to include all classes of Jews? If so, are you not confusing your supporters and impeding your effectiveness by permitting opponents of social justice to remain as members of your group? If not, should you not quickly and emphatically clarify your position on this important issue?

As symptomatic of your incorrectness, I offer the following evidence: 1) The absence of any appreciable youth elements, broad strata of Jewish intellectuals, and most important, of Jewish workers and lower middle class Jews at your meeting. 2) The unmistakable preponderance, there, of richer Jews. 3) The startling absence of any enthusiasm (even at the mention of "Palestine") so thrilling and reassuring in any movement that professes efforts towards social change. 4) The spontaneous applause (the only applause at the meeting, I believe) given to a speaker who attacked your entire essence as vague and nebulous. (I offer my own above explanation to that speaker as the correct analysis.)

In conclusion, it is my firm belief that your movement will gain clarity, support, prestige and importance only if you fight militantly and courageously for social justice and social change for Jews on an anti-capitalist class basis. May I therefore suggest as the subject for your next symposium, "Implementing Lower Class Jews for Social Change." That achieved, how much more reasonable to ask them to be better Jews.

BEN BENGAL.

November 18, 1936.

[The *Reconstructionist* viewpoint on the place of the struggle for social change in order to achieve social justice in the scheme of general and Jewish social and economic adjustment has repeatedly been made clear. In this program it is difficult to conceive that all those other forces affecting human life can be made to cease their operation until the issues of the profit-system and the struggle between labor and capital are finally and completely resolved. As we move on to a better and a more intelligently functioning society in the tomorrow, we have our tasks and our responsibilities of today. One cannot artificially dissect human personality,

nor arbitrarily segregate the motivations which make life livable into two categories; one, the physical man and his primary needs; second, the intellectual and spiritual man, and the supposedly secondary needs. Such dissection is purely academic and does not recognize the reality that we function only as *composites* and not in segments. True, we live our daily lives as beings with basic physical needs which require to be satisfactorily met, but we also live as human beings with mental, cultural and spiritual needs which are also tremendously important and which demand our simultaneous concern. "First feed the man, then give him religion" may serve as a satisfactory slogan of a missionary movement which limits its interest to saving souls. But for those who see the general problem in its entirety, in all its implications, and *practically, cannot* abandon their concern for the cultural preservation of the Jewish people while engaged simultaneously in the struggle to achieve their economic and social emancipation. Exclusive devotion to either alternative we regard as unsound.—ED.]

The Calibre of Jewish Musicians

Sirs:

I should like to suggest, with a "countenance more in sorrow than in anger," a thought not readily discernible in your editorial, "Appreciating our Jewish Musicians," in this week's *Reconstructionist*, namely: that it might be no more than fair to consider the possibility that the lukewarmness of American Jewry's appreciation of our Jewish musicians might in some measure be due not to American Jewry, but to our "Jewish musicians." Nor might it be amiss, at this point, to seek a definition of that not wholly precise phrasing. By "our," do we mean American Jewry's or world Jewry's? By "Jewish," do we mean born in the race, or given to work that is of or about the race? And by "musicians," do we mean interpreters, whether by instrument or baton, or creators? (It is with the greatest difficulty that, in this connection, I refrain from adversion to the Holy Roman Empire.)

Hava venithacmah, and let us consider the case of Weinberg. Have you heard his "Pioneers" performed in Mecca Temple last year or so, and fashioned about the halutzim? What was Jewish in the music — of idiom, or of phrase, or of modulation — or, most important, of feeling? Or, as you suggest, take Saminsky. Does his pontificating Sunday evening at the Cathedral of Reform, where he presides over the decorous twitterings of his choir in Lewandowski, Sulzer, *et al.,* make him a "Jewish musician" as we have defined it here? Or does he earn the right to that title because periodically he presides over concerts of Jewish music? Or—the only true sign—does his music, any more than Weinberg's, breathe the *elan* of our people—our sufferings, our desires, our history, our yearnings?

Or Binder, or Achron? (I plead guilty to ignorance of the others). Well intentioned as they may be (and certainly Binder is, and scholarly and sincere as well), where is the outstanding Jewish music they have written?

Two you do not mention; for one, Rosenblatt, who, though known primarily as Hazan, nevertheless within the narrow limits of the cantorial field wrote some truly characteristic things, such as his "Amar Rebbi El'azar." But the outstanding Jewish composer of the day, beyond question, is the man who, born a Jew, not only wrote on Jewish themes, but wrote Jewish music—music that swings and aches and clamors with a spirit that claims our hearts fully and immediately and spiritually, who wrote "Simhat Torah" and its companion pieces, who wrote, by request, a Friday Evening Service for the Reform congregations of America, who wrote, above all, that thrilling epic "Israel"—Ernest Bloch. In any discussion of Jewish music and Jewish "musicians," how can Bloch be overlooked? Like Mendelsohn and Myerbeer and Offenbach and Rubenstein and so many others, he had Jewish blood in his veins, but unlike them, he wrote on specifically Jewish themes, and although he did not deign to employ the shopworn devices of the diminished 7th and other threadbare cliches, his music on these themes sings aloud with the ecstasy of the Hasidim or the exaltation of Isaiah. And in the face of the complete and universal acceptance of him, how can the claim be raised that we do not appreciate our "musicians"? (Except that you, in your unlooked-for disregard of him, give support to your own thesis.)

Is it not rather the fact that we are *too apt* to shower our acclaim upon those of our brethren who reach any concert hall, no matter how obscure? And therein lies the answer to your plaint: the reason for our lack of appreciation for our composers lies not with us, but with them. This is one case where we need not say *en ha-het talui ela bi.* The sad fact is that the men mentioned, however industrious and well-meaning, do not measure up to the standards of merit, which is but another way of saying that (as witness Bloch) there is no lack of appreciation, merely a lack of genius.

And now, not quite *'agav urha,* may I suggest "an exalting experience of Jewish art at its best" to bring home to us the worthwhileness of—and probably a new sense of dignity in—being a Jew, an experience which perhaps, like the later quartets of Beethoven, must be experienced several times before appreciation will dawn? It may truly be called a work of art. I refer to, and cannot too strongly recommend, any Shabbat morning service at Shearith Israel, the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue. If, with all our "low-church" sermons, we were to cultivate, for the sake of the artistic sensibilities of our youth, a more "high-church" service, we might have less cause to remark sadly upon the diminishing hold of the synagogue on our people.

D. I. KAP.

November 25, 1936.

[Ernest Bloch was not mentioned in the editorial precisely because he was regarded as the one Jewish musician who gained due recog-

nition. Incidentally, it has come to our attention recently that even his talents are considered by his friends to be unappreciated, and a society is being formed to stimulate the production of more of Bloch's compositions.—Ed.]

Thought-Provoking, But Wrong

Sirs:

Referring to the questions raised in the first editorial of your November 27 issue, permit me to point out to you two basic faults in your structure,—faults which preclude any possibility of a massed adherence to your theories, namely:

1. The attempt to include socialism or "a cooperative form of society," as one of the basic tenets of Judaism dooms your program to perpetual futility. There is a great deal of difference between the ideals of social justice as preached by our Prophets and the Marxian theory of Socialism which you are trying to have us take as part of our Judaism. We are going to stick to our Prophets.

2. Your flexible "God-idea" makes too uncertain a platform for anyone but an acrobat to be able to stand upon it. Your cardinal principle here seems to be that the people ought to have only the kind and size of God that they may be willing to accept. With this sort of "God-idea" as the mainspring of your movement, you need not be concerned as to the manner in which your followers might be grouped. There aren't going to be any followers capable of being grouped.

Outside of that, I think you are quite all right and I shall be glad to continue to read your interesting little journal for the thought-provoking material that it contains.

November 27, 1936 A. D. BRAHAM.

[The correspondent is referred to the forthcoming volume, "The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion," by Mordecai M. Kaplan, for a clear formulation of the "God-idea."—Ed.]

Working From Within

Sirs:

The purpose of Reconstructionism should not be to create a new Jewish sect, whatever be the provocation or the apparent desirability. For sectarian movements in Judaism (witness the Saduccees, the Karaites, and without doubt, the Reformist movement), have always disappeared from Jewish life. Reconstructionism will be more effective, in my opinion, by working from within; it must always be in the center of Jewish life rather than on its periphery. . . .

The Reconstructionist movement should raise funds to subvene those who can make a positive contribution to the Jewish people. It must subvene the creative Jewish artist, the musician, the sculptor, the painter, who is willing to devote his art to the expression of Jewish life.

It must subvene Jewish scholarship . . . and make propaganda for the creation of a Jewish University. . . . Reconstructionism can have a bright future if it will organize those people who are interested in the survival of the Jewish people for tangible projects of the kind enumerated above. The reconstruction of Judaism is a gradual process, so let us not be . . . too sanguine in our expectations of immediate results. . . .

BERNARD SCHMOOKLER.

Realities of Jewish Life

THE elections for the Warsaw Jewish Community took place last September. There were 41 tickets. Of the 50 *parnassim,* 14 are Bundists, 16 Zionists (including 4 Mizrahists and 2 Poale Zionists), 15 Orthodox (including 10 Agudists).

* * *

In Vienna, Jews number 271 photographers out of 710 (31 per cent).

* * *

From 1881 to 1935 the immigration to the United States amounted to 27,787,792. Of that number 2,343,882 were Jews. During the period of 1931-1935 the average Jewish immigration was 3,958.

The deficit incurred by the Palestine Administration during the six months of April-October 1936 amounted to only £25,000 in spite of unrest, loss of life and property, and cost of defense.

* * *

The Palestine Olympic Committee is preparing to send a team to the 1940 Olympics in Japan in honor of the 2100th anniversary of the death of Judas Maccabeus.

* * *

The first concert to be conducted by Toscanini in Palestine will be given on December 26, in Tel-Aviv. The orchestra consists of 60 musicians. The first soloist will be Adolf Busch.